

# TIME



**In an exclusive interview with Paul Fischer, director Robert Zemeckis talks about his latest time travels in his latest film, *Back To The Future III***

**D**irector Robert Zemeckis is one of Hollywood's most successful film makers, having neatly carved himself a reputation as a director of quality commercial cinema.

Born and raised in Chicago, Robert studied cinema at the University of Southern California, winning an Academy Award for his student film *Field Of Honor*. It was on the strength of that film that he and his writing partner Bob Gale persuaded Steven Spielberg to direct their first screenplay *1941*. In 1978, he made his directorial debut with *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, and that was followed by the comedy *Used Cars*, both of which he co-wrote with Bob Gale. But it was with his third film that ranked him as a major director. The film was *Romancing The Stone* and its success enabled Zemeckis to direct

another Zemeckis-Gale screenplay called *Back To The Future*, which grossed some \$350 million worldwide. He then spent two years developing the complex animated/live action film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, which also passed the \$350 million mark at the box-office. He followed that with *Back To The Future II* and his latest film *Back To The Future III* which concludes the Marty McFly/Doc saga. In a special interview, the gifted director spent some time discussing his latest films with Paul Fischer by phone from his Hollywood office.

**Paul Fischer: What goes through your mind when you look back and see your pre-*Romancing The Stone* films?**

Robert Zemeckis: That's interesting, because sometimes I remember making them and sometimes I sort of get involved in them and watch them as if somebody else made them. I haven't even watched them for years, because it's not something I do; maybe I should. Perhaps I ought to pull them out and look at them, although the problem there is that you'll know how they end.

**PF: Were you surprised at the success of *Romancing The Stone*?**

RZ: Yeah, absolutely. That was a very pleasant surprise.

**PF: Is it fair to say had it not been for the success of the film you would never have been able to make the first *Back To The Future*?**

RZ: Yes, and actually I know that for a fact, because I wrote *Back To The Future* before I made *Romancing The Stone* and no one would make it. Then after *Romancing The Stone* became successful, everybody wanted to make *Back To The Future*.

**PF: Why didn't Hollywood want to make *Back To The Future* originally?**

RZ: They didn't think it would make any money. You see nobody knows anything and that is the one thing you've got to understand. And they also don't know anything know, because they think that I have some magic formula to make successful films. What they don't understand is that what I'm doing in the films that are successful are the same that were in the films that were successful before. That's showbiz. Either people want to see a movie called *Romancing The Stone* or they don't.

**PF: How did the first *Back To The Future* originate?**

RZ: It was just an idea - a fantasy - of what it would be like to have a young teen boy go back and meet his father at the same age; that was



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the germ of the idea. That then lent itself to a time travel story.

**PF:** When you began making the film, was a trilogy at the back of your mind?

**RZ:** No definitely not. We didn't expect that first film to be so successful. I mean they don't make sequels to films that aren't successful. We did have fun speculating about some of the ideas that turned out to be in the trilogy that were sort of cooked up and explored while we were writing the first film, but we never sat down and said: If this movie is a success, then we're going to do this, this and this. Afterwards, we were able to remember some of those ideas.

**PF:** Why do you think *Back To The Future* was such a successful film?

**RZ:** I like to think it was because it was a good film.

**PF:** Some critics have made comparisons between your trilogy and that of Spielberg's *Indiana Jones* trilogy, with its dark central film, surrounded by two light movies. How do you respond to that?

**RZ:** Ours is different in that their movies were complete films in the sense of them being separate. Our movie (*Back To The Future II*) was always intended to be put together with the third movie; we were making two parts of the trilogy at the end there. So it's different in that sense. Certainly nothing was being done consciously to have the same tone as say *Temple Of Doom*.

**PF:** With *Back To The Future II*, why did you alter your visual and comedic style so dramatically?

**RZ:** When I direct I try and serve the story, and there were darker moments to examine. *Part II* is a story about the whole science of time travel going wrong, and the consequences of what would happen if this power were to fall into a dangerous set of hands. So I thought I had to serve that idea as a director.

**PF:** Why did you decide to set *Back To The Future III* in the West in particular?

**RZ:** Actually it wasn't the West. When you say that, it sounds like the West is some other place. In fact it was a conscious decision, in that we felt that one of the main characters of the saga was the town of Hill Valley itself and you've seen it through all these different time periods. So Bob (Gale, co-writer and producer) always felt that the only appropriate place to end the trilogy was at the birth of one of our characters, which is Hill Valley itself the fictional town. That just happens to be in the American West; we figured that the town would have been



born somewhere in the 1880's. But it then lends itself to all of the Western trappings.

**PF:** In doing a 'Western' you must have fulfilled a fantasy ...

**RZ:** Yeah, I mean I never really had a fantasy to do a Western as such, but what I loved about the Western is that they're so uniquely American, in terms of both the tales that they tell and the characters they bring to life. That was something I always liked and finally had the forum to do something where you saw Irish immigrants coming to the American West and see the birth of the country and the frontier spirit.

**PF:** How has Michael J. Fox developed as an actor since the first film?

**RZ:** He's always been great, and I think he's just gotten better, as he's become older and more experienced.

**PF:** Why do you think this third film will be the success that people are predicting?

**RZ:** I think audiences will go and see it because, like the first film, they'll think it's a good film, and it celebrates the same sort of spirit as the first movie did in its tone and humour and emotional impact.

**PF:** Having now made sequels to *Back To The Future*, will there be more of *Roger Rabbit*?

**RZ:** I believe there is going to be another one, but I won't be involved with it; it's too difficult to do another. One of those in a lifetime is enough.

**PF:** Finally, what's next for you?

**RZ:** I really don't know. I'm taking a year's sabbatical and go fishing. ☆